

FEBRUARY 21, 1974

News reports are going to have people turning back flips without a mat to soften the fall. Gloomy copy comes in every hour. Bad news has become our standard fare.

In other parts, trouble has broken out around the gasoline stations. Long lineups of frustrated motorists have turned the gasoline grinder's life into a perilous proposition. Peaceful citizens have become rough to handle. Happy motoring signs are now a farce.

The first time I ran out of gasoline was in a ranching town south of San Antonio. Like being on foot, it was a mighty inconvenient situation. A griddle and grease expert in a hamburger joint had to direct me to an out-of-the-way station. The owner turned out to be a defector from the old time friend-in-need religion.

We got along real well until the head pumper added a fictitious quart of oil to the bill. Policy had changed to adjust to the energy shortage. I suspect that this Robin Hood of the fuel world thought he was preparing to pluck one more pullet for an extra 80 cents. Last year the same outfit was probably giving away simulated ice tea glasses to anyone who would wave as they passed by.

I offered to settle for half of the new surcharge. But the kid got so smart alecky that I withdrew that offer. Young swindlers, as I advised him, need to learn that the time to rob a hen's nest is before the owner has gathered the eggs. You see, I already had the gasoline in my tank. So I bid that young oil bandit adios and told him to be sure and start studying harder at school.

From there on, many of the pumps were covered by big paper sacks to indicate the tanks were dry. Gasoline pumps covered in paper look shroud. I didn't realize you could get that much drama from a paper bag, or I'd of been using them to dramatize our cause. On old thin cow standing by the road with a feed sack on her head would draw a lot of attention. With feed dealers nearly having to take a correspondence course in the Russian language to deal on the market, we are going to need new gimmicks.

At the next stop I had more trouble. I asked the grinder if he happened to know the saturation point of concrete driveways. I figured that as much gasoline as had been spilled, some smart fossil fuel miner might develop a secondary recovery method that'd help relieve the shortage.

His feet must have been hurting him, because he sure did get mad. The old adage that nobody is perfect was his defense. I started to tell him that nobody had to be that imperfect, pumping four-bit a gallon gas, but decided I better quit a loser.

Politicians are screaming that the oil companies are making excessive profits. I wish they'd drop that idea. Elected worthies got spoiled after the farm bloc folded. The pols had such a grand time over the fate of the farmers that they developed the false impression they could push anyone around.

Jumping on herders and planters is in no way related to hurting an oil company's feelings. Oilmen can make their antagonists do acrobatic tricks so fast that the high wire and the net can't be installed fast enough.

Oil operators won't stand around for the old double hocus pocus. Somebody ought to inform those boys up in Washington to cool off, or they'll find themselves sitting in an electric chair instead of an elected one.

The experience did make me check the mileage on my pickup. At 55 miles per hour, backed by tailwind, I made 40 city blocks on a tankful. I didn't know it would do that well. I may enter her next year in the Baja California test. Some oil company might pay big money for the fuel pump design.

I sure was glad to get within walking distance of the Shortgrass Country. Gasoline grinders are going to hold the cards for awhile. I just hope that larcenous kid doesn't step on a big nail. Though I taught him a good lesson, he still has a lot to learn.